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## Authored Accepted Version

### Editorial introduction: Queer Asia as Method

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#### Abstract

This introduction outlines the theoretical and methodological interventions proposed by the Crosscurrent special section, *Queer Asia as Method*, which interrogates the dynamic intersections of queer studies, Asian studies and critical media scholarship to challenge Eurocentric epistemologies and colonial frameworks. Emerging from scholarly dialogues initiated in 2021, this framework challenges the Euro-American dominance often found within queer studies by centring the intricate, fluid intersections of 'queernesses' and 'Asias'. We argue for examining how media technologies and transnational cultural flows across diverse Asian contexts shape, circulate and contest queernesses and Asian-nesses, offering rich ground for epistemological and methodological innovation. Building upon the discourse of 'Asia as Method', this approach positions Asia not merely as a source of data but as a critical vantage point for decolonising knowledge production and interrogating established epistemes. The introduction highlights the significance of inter-Asian referencing, the role of media as both terrains of struggle and tools for generating transformative momentum. The collection also highlights the precarious labour of marginalised scholars navigating institutional erasure and geopolitical violence, framing 'Queer Asia as Method' as both an insurgent academic project and a call for interdisciplinary, anti-colonial solidarity. We frame the subsequent essays in the themed section, which critique the coloniality embedded in dominant queer studies from their situated queernesses in Asias, advocating instead for methods that foreground situational, transcolonial and embodied experiences, ranging from

techno-Orientalism, and queer entrepreneurship in China to hybrid languages in Indian film, and pedagogical affects in Indonesia, demonstrating the polyvocality and critical potential of Queer Asia as Method.

### **Keywords**

Asia as method, decolonial methods, inter-Asian referencing, media technologies, queer Asia, queernesses

The relationship between ‘queer’ and ‘Asia’ in terms of media and cultural exchange has developed in intricate ways since the turn of the century, navigating diverse contestations and complex theoretical frameworks. At the intersection of these concepts lies a rich terrain for methodological innovations, particularly in how media technologies and practices offer new grounds for exploring what can be understood at the intersection called queer Asia. With Asian cultures hosting a vast majority of media production, its consumers and a multiplicity of digital platforms, the possibilities for the transnational flows of media and the many affective communities fostered therein, serve as a critical site for examining the role of media in producing, circulating, contesting queerness in Asian contexts. Where the question of queer Asia and its multiplicities are yet ever emergent, the questions of Queer Asia as Method, particularly through the lens of critical media studies, offers as yet unasked questions relevant to the fields of queer studies, media studies and within transnational cultural studies. This themed section offers engagement with the role of media technologies in shaping, or being shaped by, queerness in Asian cultures, histories and communities (affective or embodied)? Such questions inform how our approach to ‘queer’ as a term that, while rooted in Euro-American contexts, finds new meanings through its interaction with a complex, transnational, interstitial and rapidly burgeoning landscape of Asian cultures and media.

In September 2021, Ge Liang and J. Daniel Luther (along with Bao Hongwei and Victor Fan) organised a roundtable and townhall titled ‘Queer Asia as Method’.<sup>1</sup> The orientation of this roundtable and townhall was geared towards examining the questions:

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<sup>1</sup> Queer Asia as Method: Roundtable and Townhall 2021, 4–5 September 2021, <https://queer-asia.com/qamethod2021/> (accessed 30 April 2025).

What is Queer Asia as Method? How has the commingling of queerness and disciplinary projects in Asia inflected each other? How do they enable a transnational praxis that is critically informing the work of diversity and inclusion in the arts and humanities? Moreover, does queerness in resistance/rupture and/or reparation inform the work of decolonising the curriculum?

The workshop brought together over twenty scholars from diverse disciplines to debate the potential of queer Asia as a method over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, this themed collection draws together some of their thoughts and conversations on media, culture and the praxis of labouring in the messy intersections of queer, Asia and method. On the other hand, these essays are a smaller collection of the complexities of the conversations engendered at the roundtable and townhall.

As a roundtable, followed by a townhall, the virtual event on Queer Asia as Method in September 2021 was a participatory and generous engagement that was rooted in intentionally cross-pollinating across geo-political, disciplinary and epistemic knowledge and praxis. It began with opening position papers from Anjali Arondekar, Geeta Patel, Petrus Liu and Song Hwee Lim and were followed by conversations and papers in development from scholars, practitioners and activists navigating questions rooted in the larger discourse of Asia as method emerging from the work of scholars including Gayatri Spivak, Chen Kuan-hsing, Shih Shu-mei and Stuart Hall.

Of the many scholars who participated in the roundtable and townhall, those themed in this collection draw together knowledge and praxis on media and culture in Asian contexts as a critical site of the interplay of queernesses. We use queernesses in the way in which it was articulated by the queer South Asian poet Kamala Das (later Kamala Surayya) in 'An Introduction' originally published in English in 1965 (Surayya, 1965). She writes, '... The language I speak/ Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses/ All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half/ Indian. . .' (Das, 2014: 5). These essays investigate how media technologies – from digital networks to visual cultures – and cultural intersections offer new possibilities for exploring queer Asia. At the same time, they consider how Queer Asia as Method contributes to critical media and cultural studies by challenging the dominant Euro-American paradigms. By pairing queer studies with media, culture and area studies (Park and Dodd, 2020), these essays approach both queernesses and Asian-ness as placeholders for desires that remain fluid, contingent or under erasure (Arondekar and Patel, 2016: 154).

Therefore, this themed section, *Queer Asia as Method*, addresses: How does queer Asia function as method and inform the polyphonic intersection of media studies, queer studies, area studies and cultural studies? How do media technologies enable new forms of queer visibility or invisibility, affective and embodied communities and digital or street activism in Asia? As well as how these practices inform transnational and transgressive praxis that require diverse methodologies spanning both social sciences and the humanities?

As praxis, this edited collection also emerges from the long and continued voluntary labour of early career and non-institutionalised academics in furthering a nascent field that itself teeters on the edge of already vanishing disciplines, departments and even institutions. By labouring towards cultural and discursive legibility of a project that has always been situated as fraught, offers praxis, that is, labour in and towards an anti- colonial – if not decolonial (Lugones, 2010) – project as an insistent method in the face of constant and invisibilising marginalisation within the colonial military-industrial-academic complex (Giroux, 2007). This particularly not as knowledge in and of itself, but oriented towards building greater solidarities and cross-fertilising ideas within inter- Asian media and cultural contexts.

Luther and Ung Loh (2019: 2–3) suggest that scholars working on sexuality and gender in Asia often find themselves marginalised within academic forums that assume the universality of ‘queer’ studies. They also note patterns of marginalisation that have pre-existed those working on queer studies in area intersections as early as the 2000s (Martin et al., 2008). In this context of consistent marginalisation and constant threat/fear of disappearance from academic and institutional spaces, the question of who labours in the margins and under what conditions to wedge open the door for interdisciplinary, intersectional and inter-Asia work is both political and personal. This edited collection, 5 years and a global pandemic later, is a narrow sliver of that labour we are marking as ‘*Queer Asia as Method*’. That is voluntary labour, labour performed by the precariat, in service of a field always on the brink of vanishing. As a method, it offers insistence that queernesses in Asias are a prolific site of multiplicity from which challenges to dominant and hegemonic power structures can and are issued, including the very co-opting and pink-washing of queer struggles by geo-political aggression, violence, dominance, apathy and hate. In this iteration of *Queer Asia as Method*, we stress precarious praxis, as a method that defies co-option, that insists on building solidarities beyond our silos – national, disciplinary or institutional.

We also acknowledge the many contributors to the roundtable and townhall who continued their long labour in this specific precarious intersection but who are not in this collection as they struggle(d) with imminent political and personal turmoil. These include the horrific war on Gaza and the violence against the people of Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, the institutional and political apathy in Canada, the devolving conditions under authoritarian governmentality in India, the US, China. We see and honour their labour not visible within the publishing orientation and constraints of the industrial-academic complex.

### **Queer Asia and Queer Asia as Method**

The concept of ‘Asia’ has long been contested, tethered to colonial cartographies, Orientalist fantasies and homogenising geopolitical imaginaries. Yet, as an intellectual and political project, ‘Queer Asia’ or ‘Queer Asias’ emerges not as a fixed geographical or cultural category but as an intersectional perspective from which to challenge received, hegemonic methods, including the Euro-American dominance within queer studies. Instead, Queer Asia as Method proliferates the interrogation of messy intersections of queerness, regionalism, flows of culture, media and ideas ambivalent towards the gravitational dominance of Euro-American epistemologies (Ge, 2025; Ho and Blackwood, 2024) entrenched in the colonality of the industrial-academic complex (Bhardwaj, 2021: 84; Natanel et al., 2023: 64).

Liu (2015) notes that anti-universalist claims in queer theories ironically depend on an East-West binary that marginalises non-Western experiences, reinforcing colonialist frameworks. Thus, Liu advocates for a redefined queer theory that centres geopolitical critique, moving beyond Eurocentric models to address transnational power structures and social changes: ‘These transnationally formed, nonterritorially organised power relations are rich sites to be mined for a queer theory that emphasises that “the subject” is always barred, incomplete and opaque to itself’ (Liu, 2010: 314). Similarly, Liu and Li (2025) highlight how geopolitics has historically shaped queer knowledge production and selective mutual referencing across Sinophone societies. Moreover, ‘queer’ and ‘Asia’, as noted by Chiang and Wong (2017: 122), live both ‘as a theoretical paradigm and a geopolitical metaphor – share an acute sense of ambiguity, playfulness and non-determination’. Mobilising queer (as an adjective) Asia, queering (as a verb) Asia, queering the method(ology) and Asianising queer, function as the central concerns of our Queer Asia as Method collection. Notably, as

an emerging debate, *Queer Asia as Method* is built on the larger discourse of Asia as method. As scholars including Spivak (2008), Chen (2010), Shih et al. (2013) and Stuart Hall (1991) argue that diversifying and decolonising our epistemes and methods of knowledge production is not merely a matter of collecting cultural objects and values into our research and pedagogy. This is because to do so, we often risk reframing these discourses within the established Euro-American frameworks and adopting the position of an unnamed ‘European subject’ that treats Asian practices and lived experiences as its technology of recognition (Shih et al., 2013; Spivak, 2008). Yue (2017) approaches *Queer Asia as Method* by prioritising inter-Asian cultural references, such as the Thai tomboy idols influencing Singaporean performers, which challenges Western-centric queer models. Yue’s work critiques Eurocentric ontologies of queerness and demonstrates how Singapore’s trans histories offer alternative models for understanding modernity in postcolonial contexts. Notably, without fully rethinking what it means by Asia (and in our case, queer Asia) as method, we can easily appropriate these epistemes for the purpose of reinforcing the myth of European universality. By queering this methodological turn, we seek to unsettle the colonial logics embedded in both ‘queer’ and ‘Asia’, foregrounding instead the fluid, contested and often paradoxical ways queerness is lived, mediated and theorised across Asian contexts.

Chiang and Wong (2016) argue that queering regionalism requires attending to horizontal intra-regional traffics of queerness that bypasses Euro-American mediation. For instance, the circulation of Sinophone films or Southeast Asian queer literature challenges the vertical logic of colonial modernity, revealing how queerness is shaped by transcolonial encounters and subnational hierarchies. At its core, *Queer Asia as Method* is a call to dismantle what Chiang and Wong (2016) term the ‘area unconscious’ of queer studies – the tendency to privilege Euro-American colonial modernity as the default analytical lens. Instead, this collection insists on situating queernesses within the transmogrifying and intra-regional dynamics that shape Asian sexualities, genders and embodied practices. Media technologies and cultural flows, as both tools and terrains of inquiry, serve as critical sites for interventions that centre inter-regional, inter-cultural knowledge and praxis. From digital platforms that enable transnational queer activism to cinematic narratives that reimagine historical eunuchism, media and cultural practices disrupt monolithic notions of queerness while illuminating the entangled histories of empire, governance, capitalism and resistance.

The essays in this themed section collectively argue that queering Asia requires rethinking the very conditions under which queernesses are legible. As Eguchi (2021)

contends, this requires denaturalising Asia as a geopolitical construct, anchoring analyses in the material realities of LGBTQ+ subjects and provincialising Anglo-American queer knowledge. Eguchi's struggle to reconcile his embodied positionality as a queer Japanese scholar in the U.S. underscores the necessity of centring racialised, diasporic and transregional queer experiences. Similarly, Chiang and Wong's (2016) examination of Singaporean literature and Sinophone cinema demonstrates how regionalism – as a critique of both national boundaries and global queering narratives – reveals the 'inter- corporeal politics' of queerness across time and space.

Following Chen's (2010) *Asia as Method*, this collection rejects the extraction of Asian 'data' to fit Western theoretical moulds. Instead, we treat Asia as a horizon of critique: a vantage point from which to interrogate the colonality of knowledge and imagine alternative epistemologies. Media and culture, as a site where global and local forces collide, becomes a fertile ground for such critique. Thus, this themed section works as a collaborative project to think together about the questions raised by examining media as the terrain in which to explore Queer Asia as Method. It also reflects critically on the praxis informing the work of decentring and decolonising the globalised formation of queerness, probing how media and media technologies offer new grounds for de-Westernised queer studies, unpacking how Queer Asia as Method offers a decentralised field and a politics of inter-referencing for critical media studies. By engaging media and culture as a lens, this issue amplifies the polyvocality of queer Asia. Digital networks, film, language and entrepreneurial practices become arenas where queerness is negotiated, performed and contested – often in ways that defy Eurocentric binaries of visibility/ invisibility, resistance/compliance or tradition/modernity. The contributors collectively ask: How do media technologies enable new forms of queer relationality? What method- ologies emerge when we centre Asian mediascapes as sites of queer worldmaking? And how might these interventions decolonise queer studies itself?

### **Introducing the contributions**

In *Queering Asia, Querying Method*, Lim (2025) revisits the notion of queer Asia, which has historically been rooted in the analysis of specific practices across East and Southeast Asia. Lim's work is anchored in the belief that queer theory holds a profound disruptive potential. In this article, Lim extends this engagement by bringing in a third concept: method,

specifically through the lens of Asia as Method. This theoretical framework invites a critical rethinking of how we approach knowledge production, particularly at the intersections of queerness and Asian contexts. From the outset, Lim emphasises that despite the passage of time, their position remains that queer work is never about fixity but about fluidity. Queering is inherently a form of querying – a process that challenges established structures and norms. It often operates at such an oblique angle that it unsettles the very foundations of knowledge production, particularly those forms of scholarship that seek to provide comforting answers rather than engage with difficult, unresolved questions. Lim’s article, in this spirit, positions queering not only as a theoretical tool but as an active method for interrogating the interplay between queerness, Asian identities and media practices. By bringing media technologies and platforms into the conversation, Lim suggests that the oblique nature of queering is especially pronounced in digital spaces, where representations of queer identities in Asia are continuously shifting, contested and rearticulated. In this context, queering becomes a querying of the media landscapes themselves, which are often embedded with both local cultural specificities and global hegemonies. The article stresses that Asia as Method – when applied to queer studies through media – compels us to rethink not just the content of queer representation in Asia, but also the methods by which these representations are analysed. Media technologies, as both tools and terrains of inquiry, provide dynamic spaces for these fluid identities to be explored and questioned. This positioning not only unsettles traditional knowledge structures but also transforms how we understand the interconnectedness of queer theory, Asian studies and media.

In *Queer Techno-Orientalism as Methods: Mr Robot, Uterus Man and Other Techno Futures*, Tian (2025) explores how Chinese queer bodies are portrayed in cyberpunk and sci-fi TV series, specifically focussing on their potential to subvert techno-Orientalist tropes. Tian compares *Mr Robot* (2016–19) and *Uterus Man* (2013) to reveal how these representations intertwine with technological imaginations, particularly within the context of global geopolitical tensions. Through this analysis, Tian introduces ‘queer techno-orientalism’ as a method for envisioning Sinofuturism from a mainland Chinese perspective. This approach queers the techno-Orientalist narrative by both recognising and critiquing the hypermodernity typically ascribed to Asian bodies in Western media, while also highlighting the simultaneous anxieties surrounding its imagined decline. Tian’s chapter emphasises the ways in which Chinese queer bodies are not merely passive subjects within these speculative futures but are instead positioned to challenge and redefine the techno-orientalist frameworks



that often underpin them. By doing so, the chapter suggests a new lens for understanding queer Sinofuturism and its implications in global media and cultural discourses.

In *No Success No Queer: Burnout Queerness for Queer Female Entrepreneurs in Post-socialist Urban China*, Tang (2025) examines the rise of feminist and queer e-commerce in China following the crowd start-up and public innovation reforms introduced in 2015. Through ethnographic research conducted with queer female entrepreneurs in urban China in 2017, Tang explores how these women, many of whom returned from the West to establish their own e-businesses, represent a new form of queerness that paradoxically aligns with capital and the state. Tang introduces the concept of ‘burnout queerness’, drawing from Han Byung-Chul’s theory of burnout, to describe how queer individuals navigate the pressures of self-exploitation in the digital age under intensified neoliberalism. Tang argues that these female queer entrepreneurs embody a unique intersection of queerness and entrepreneurship, reflecting both the opportunities and tensions of operating within China’s rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape. Tang’s focus on digital labour echoes the critique of cisheteronormative capitalism, underscoring how queer subjects negotiate – and sometimes reinforce – systems of power. The essay also complements Tian’s techno-orientalism analysis by highlighting the gendered dimensions of China’s digital revolution.

In *In Search of a Queer Language in Contemporary Indian Film: Languages ‘Upside Down’ as Resistance to Euro-American Universalisms*, Bakshi (2025) explores how Brajabuli – a *mischsprache* or hybrid language – was rediscovered by queer Bengali filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh as a medium for expressing romantic longing and desire in his films. Focussing on Ghosh’s *Memories in March* (2011), Bakshi argues that Ghosh employed Brajabuli as an emergent language of queer desire, not as a simple attempt to de-imperialise by returning to pre-colonial cultures, but as a dynamic and evolving form of expression. Drawing on the works of Rabindranath Tagore (1912) and Sukumar Sen (1935), Bakshi shows that Brajabuli transcends regional, linguistic and ethnic boundaries, making it an apt metaphor for queerness. Like queerness, Brajabuli is a language in constant flux, free from rigid grammatical rules. The chapter also highlights how medieval poet Vidyapati, and the neo-Vaishnavite poets of the Gaudiya Vaishnavite tradition (15th– 16th centuries) used Brajabuli to celebrate sexuality, passion and polyamory, particularly in their depictions of the Radha-Krishna love story, further establishing its relevance as a queer medium of expression.

In *Queer Indonesia: What’s Queer About Queer Studies in Indonesia?* Wijaya (2025) uses an autoethnographic approach to demonstrate the centrality of negative affects in

teaching queer studies in Indonesia. Wijaya thus positions such affects as parts of queer methods to reveal the connections between queer affects, pedagogical experience and academic precarity. They highlight envy, rage, burnout and anxiety the authors experienced when teaching queer studies as guest lecturers in several Indonesian universities/ community forums as a by-product of the precarious position of queer studies and rising homophobia in the country's education landscape. Wijaya's focus on embodied methodology, emphasises how queer scholarship is inseparable from the material and emotional toll of marginalisation. The essay also echoes Tang's analysis of burnout, illustrating how systemic oppression manifests across diverse Asian contexts. Wijaya's positionality as a knowledge-worker not located directly within academic institutions offers a critical addition to the precarious work it takes to hold open queer Asia as a powerful positionality (see also their edited collection, Tang and Wijaya, 2022).

### **Concluding remarks**

The essays demonstrate how queer Asia is not a peripheral 'case study' but a generative site of theory and praxis. From Brajabuli's linguistic queerness to Sinofuturist temporalities, this collection of essays expands what counts as practice and as 'queer knowledge'. Moreover, the contributors illustrate how media technologies and cultural flows – whether through digital platforms, film or language – are not neutral tools but active agents in shaping queer subjectivities. Media and culture are means for mapping the tensions between visibility and erasure, resistance and complicity. By centring situational, transregional, transcolonial and intra-cultural critique, this collection maps methodologies that are rooted in embodied experiences yet attuned to transnational flows. Ultimately, *Queer Asia as Method* invites scholars to re-consider what Muñoz (2009) called 'queer utopia' – a forward-dawning horizon where the impossible becomes possible. In denaturalising Asia, queering media and culture and provincialising the West, *Queer Asia as Method* charts a path towards a more inclusive, transgressive episteme – one where queernesses or Asianess is not a fixed identity or a floating signifier deprived of substantial meanings, but a perpetual becoming which can bring transformative momentum to burst open the designations and uncover new possibilities through the (im)possibilities of queer Asias.

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